

drinking at the bird fountain and helping themselves to anything they wish in the garden or chicken coop. But with all this, I have been much interested in watching them catch insects like good, honest, hard-working native birds. They chase moths, work over a rosebush until every saw-fly is found, and assume the attitude and industry of warblers in their patience and thoroughness.

Black-locust trees shade the front porch of the house and these are badly infested with leaf-miners. I can not be positive, but what are the sparrows hunting when they go quietly from twig to twig through these trees unless it is the miners? And do they break through the epidermis of the leaf to get at them?

The only insects the sparrows seem to avoid are the hard, green "June-bugs" with very scratchy legs, which are so abundant just now that when I approach a peach tree on the fruit of which the beetles are feeding, it seems that I have disturbed a nest of big bumblebees. Robins and redbirds live in the back of the garden, but they also seem to avoid the "June-bugs."

It is only fair that I make this somewhat tardy and forced admission regarding the value of English sparrows in the great battle between insects and man.

I watched a most interesting contest between a female English sparrow and a bird-wing grasshopper,—the one with the pretty yellow and black wings that "dances" in the summer sunshine. For fully five minutes the sparrow chased the insect up and down the street, being foiled at every turn by the quickness of the grasshopper, which rose higher in the air or dropped to a lower level as an aeroplane would do to escape a Zeppelin. I never saw a bird seem so heavy and so helpless as this one in its continued vain efforts to make a captive, and it finally abandoned the chase, allowing the insect to fly away on triumphant wing.

W. A. MURRILL.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### HOUSE'S LIST OF NEW YORK STATE PLANTS\*

No recent systematic paper better illustrates the intolerable conditions existing in nomenclature than this list of New York

\* House, H. D. Annotated list of the ferns and flowering plants of New York State. Bull. N. Y. State Mus. 254: 1-757. September, 1924.

plants by the State botanist. As this review is being written (December 11) there are already ominous rumblings in that periodic, but almost continuous, warfare between the rival nomenclatorial camps,—a warfare as fratricidal and silly as any ever known in botany.

The reviewer once wrote in another connection “species and varieties are concepts of convenience, nay, of absolute necessity, in talking or writing about plants, but hardly expressions of exact truth.” But are species and varieties even concepts of convenience when their names may be changed over night? The ecologist, or physiologist, or cytologist, or what not, cares not a straw whether systematic botanists bow down to the Gods of Priority in New York or of Precedence in Boston, but they are fast reaching the conclusion that unless systematic botanists agree to bow down to the God of Convenience, and make that adulation abject, they will pray for a quick finish fight,—and dance rather indecently upon the grave of the loser.

What all non-systematists pray for is that the gentlemen in whose hands rest the destiny of plant names substitute for their darling codes that kind of morality which understands that nomenclature is first and last an absolutely necessary *convenience*. What caters to that end is good,—all else is outside the pale.

Dr. House appears to suffer, like so many of his colleagues, from the uncertainty which this intolerable situation necessarily entails. On one page we read of the common sense retention of certain species names, hallowed by ages of use, while on another, and there are a distressing number of these, he is abject in his worship of priority, with disastrous consequences to equally well-known names. Scores could be mentioned, let one suffice. In 1923 the author felt moved to describe the white-flowered form of the common marshmallow as *Hibiscus Moscheutos* forma *Peckii*. That was unimpeachable, if one cares to designate mere color forms by names. In the present volume he abandons that recently christened infant because he takes up the Linnaean name *H. palustris*, and is, of course, forced to coin the new combination *Hibiscus palustris* forma *Peckii*. There are also many new names due to questions of interpretation of specific limits. With such honest differences of opinion all botanists will agree. Progress can only come from those able and willing

to study these propositions and report upon them. Such interpretations of fact whether they lead to new names or not are in a very different category from mere name changing. Upon this score Dr. House's new book will receive the respectful attention which its evident care and scholarship entitle it.

There can, of course, be nothing but praise for the undertaking—which has lain dormant since the flora of John Torrey in 1843. It is a tremendous piece of work to even list all the plants found in such a large and ecologically diversified state as New York. The author has, in addition to the State Herbarium, relied on printed lists or local floras, among them the reviewer's "Flora of the Vicinity of New York." In such a large book it would be incredible if some errors had not crept in. Of *Teucrium canadense* he says: "Recorded by Taylor as occasional on Long Island." I recorded it from Staten Island. And there are others. But to cite such here would be both useless and tend to create the impression that I am harping upon very thin strings. Actually the new work inspires admiration for its scope and intent, if a considerable amount of misgiving over some of its details. Its defects are mostly attributable to the causes outlined above, and from these Dr. House is no more immune than any of us.

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## SHRUBS OF INDIANA

CHARLES C. DEAN\*

This book is a sequel to the author's *Trees of Indiana*, which it resembles in size and binding as well as in plan and arrangement. It is well bound in cloth, printed on good paper and the typography is excellent. In these respects it is superior to the majority of state reports. 143 species are described as native to the state and two others,—*Rosa Eglantheria* and *Lonicera japonica*,—as naturalized. Some fifty other species are mentioned as having been reported from the state but are excluded because the author has been unable to verify their occurrence or because

\* Publication No. 44 of the Department of Conservation of the State of Indiana, Dec. 1924; 351 pages, 148 plates.